

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (currently amended) A method for expanding the functionality of a content receiver comprising a set-top box, said method comprising:

installing a firmware patch in a downstream content receiver that configures said downstream content receiver to forward user commands upstream;

receiving a command from said downstream content receiver requesting Internet access;

[[and]]

determining whether the command is directed to a server further upstream; and

executing the command if the command is not directed to a server further upstream, wherein executing the command provides access to the Internet to said downstream content receiver.

2. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 further comprising, if the command is directed to a server further upstream, the step of directing an unexecuted command to a server further upstream.

3. (currently amended) A method for expanding the functionality of a content receiver comprising the steps of:

installing a firmware patch in a downstream content receiver that configures said downstream content receiver to forward user commands upstream;

receiving a command from said downstream content receiver; [[and]]

determining whether the command is directed to an augmentation unit further upstream;

and

if the command is directed to an augmentation unit further upstream, directing the command to said augmentation unit further upstream;

wherein the step of directing the command to an augmentation unit further upstream comprises the steps of:

receiving data packets addressed to an upstream augmentation unit;

generating a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and

conveying the modulated carrier signal to an upstream interface.

4. (cancelled)

5. (previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein said firmware patch installed in the downstream content receiver minimally causes a processor in the downstream content receiver to:

fragment an unexecuted command into one or more data packets;

generate a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and

convey the modulated carrier signal to an upstream augmentation unit.

6. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein the step of receiving a command from a downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

receiving a data packet from a downstream interface according to a delivery address;
associating the data packet with a network message; and
directing a network message to a command parser that executes a command contained in the network message.

7. (previously presented) The method of claim 6 wherein the step of receiving a data packet from a downstream interface comprises the steps of:

receiving a modulated carrier signal;
extracting a digital bit stream from the modulated carrier; and
framing the bit stream into data packets.

8. (previously presented) The method of claim 3 wherein the command received is a record command and the step of executing the command comprises the steps of:

receiving a content stream from an upstream signal source; and
recording the content stream.

9. (previously presented) The method of claim 3 wherein the command received is a play command and the step of executing the command comprises the steps of:

determining what content is requested for play;
retrieving the requested content; and
directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver.

10. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein the step of directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

- modulating a carrier signal according to the content stream;
- combining the modulated carrier signal with a multiple carrier signal; and
- conveying the combined signal to the downstream content receiver.

11. (original) The method of claim 9 wherein the step of directing the retrieved content to the downstream content receiver comprises the steps of:

- modulating a carrier signal according to the content stream; and
- conveying the modulated carrier signal to the downstream content receiver in lieu of a multiple carrier signal.

12. (previously presented) A content receiver augmentation unit comprising:

- a downstream interface;
- a content receiver initiation unit that configures a downstream content receiver to forward commands by installing a firmware patch in the downstream content receiver; and
- a command executive that receives a command from the downstream interface and determines whether the command is addressed to said augmentation unit or a unit further upstream, wherein said command executive executes the command if the command is not directed to a server unit further upstream.

13. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 12 further comprises an upstream interface and wherein the command executive comprises a command forwarding unit that directs unexecuted commands to the upstream interface.

14. (previously presented) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 13 wherein the command forwarding unit receives data packets addressed to an upstream augmentation unit and directs these to the upstream interface and wherein the upstream interface comprises:

a modulator that generates a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
a multiplexing filter capable of directing the modulated carrier into an upstream path.

15. (cancelled)

16. (previously presented) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 12 wherein said firmware patch installed in the content receiver minimally causes a processor in the content receiver to:

fragment an unexecuted command into one or more data packets;
generate a modulated carrier signal according to the data packets; and
convey the modulated carrier signal to an upstream augmentation unit.

17. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 13 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

data packet receiver that receives data packets according to a delivery address; and
message assembly unit that assembles one or more received data packets into a network message and wherein the command executive comprises a command parser that receives the network message and executes a command contained therein.

18. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 17 wherein the data packet receiver comprises:

demodulator that generates a digital bit stream according to a modulated carrier; and
data packet framer that generates data according to the digital bit stream.

19. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 12 further comprising a content storage unit and wherein the upstream interface comprises a content receiver that is capable of receiving a content stream from an upstream source and directs said content stream to the content storage unit if the command executive receives a record command.

20. (original) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 12 further comprising a content storage unit wherein the command executive directs the content storage unit to direct a content stream to the downstream interface according to a received command if said received command is a play command.

21. (previously presented) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 20 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

- a modulator that generates a modulated signal according to a content stream; and
- a signal combiner capable of combining the modulated signal with a multiple carrier signal.

22. (previously presented) The content receiver augmentation unit of claim 20 wherein the downstream interface comprises:

- a modulator that generates a modulated signal according to a content stream; and
- a signal selector capable of selecting the modulated signal in lieu of a multiple carrier signal.

23-51. (cancelled)